

Moral Responsibility in Genocide: Humanity as both Victim and Perpetrator in Gil
Courtemanche's *Un Dimanche à la piscine à Kigali*

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Abstract

ANGELA PETERS: Moral Responsibility in Genocide: Humanity as both Victim and Perpetrator in Gil Courtemanche's *Un Dimanche à la piscine à Kigali*
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While the Rwandan Genocide was virtually absent from the news during the months of violence in the spring of 1994, there have since been many photos, films, books and news reports representing the atrocities. With all of these graphic depictions, it is important to pose the question of how one can justly and ethically represent the horror without overly simplifying the situation or exploiting the people by trying to sell the violence. In his hybrid novel, *Un dimanche à la piscine à Kigali*, Gil Courtemanche offers an example of an ethical representation of the terrifying events because he presents the crimes as committed both by and against humanity as a whole. He does not further perpetuate the racial stereotypes of Africans: either savage killer or worthless victim. Courtemanche refuses to further degrade the victims or to simplify the situation to make it seem like fictional horror, both of which would allow the reader to detach himself from the cruel reality. Instead, Courtemanche actually chooses to use voyeuristic literary strategy in order to implicate the reader in accusations against a world that failed in its response to the Rwandan genocide and to include the reader among the violated victims.

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Introduction

Media representations of the Rwandan genocide have been limited both in number and in the way the complexity of the events has been reduced; they simplify the realities of genocide and work to further degrade and victimize the Rwandans implicated. Contrary to this unfortunate yet pervasive trend of representation, *Un dimanche à la piscine à Kigali* transcends this reductionist depiction of genocide in which the perpetrators are seen as evil and the victims as helpless beings in need of saving. Gil Courtmanche takes advantage of his profession as journalist in order to create a hybrid text, both fiction and first-hand account, that surpasses the actual events of the genocide and creates a narrative space in which no one escapes the guilt or the violence experienced in Rwanda. In a warning to the reader in his preamble, Courtemanche discusses the hybridity of his novel and also testifies to the veracity of his report:

Ce roman est un roman. Mais c'est aussi une chronique et un reportage. Les personnages ont tous existé et dans presque tous les cas j'ai utilisé leur véritable nom. Le romancier leur a prêté une vie, des gestes et des paroles qui résument ou symbolisent ce que le journaliste a constaté en les fréquentant. (Courtemanche 12)

He warns the readers not to assume that the descriptions of the violence and cruelty are embellished for effect. These guidelines for the reader help to avoid the emotional and moral distancing that can occur when the atrocities of reality seem more like a horror film. However, in order to do justice to the events and victims, and have the possibility of preventing similar atrocities in the future, it is important that the reader/spectator does not allow the events to transform into the imaginary like a scary nightmare. Courtemanche stayed faithful to the actual stories and events, a task which has also helped him to

comprehensively demonstrate the complexity of the situations and the people involved and encouraged the reader to stay in the discomfort of an unfortunate truth.

Surpassing binary roles of victim and aggressor

Courtemanche simultaneously illuminates the realities of two different but overlapping manifestations of violence associated with racism and other prejudices: the April 1994 massacres and AIDS. The violent killings of Tutsis in the spring of 1994 were largely an aggression committed by the Hutus with the support, both implicit and explicit, of Western powers. This genocide is recognized internationally as such. However, AIDS is also considered a genocide in *Un dimanche à la piscine à Kigali* as it ruthlessly kills large portions of the population. Through the characters of his text Courtemanche implicates the international community as the perpetrators of this second genocide; because of their indifference, racism, fear, or hatred, they allow the country to be ravaged by this illness. However, it is not only the international community who is at fault as the Rwandan government is said to deny statistics and surround victims with such a sense of shame that silence is further encouraged and thus knowledge and AIDS prevention are close to impossible. The violence of AIDS as a tool for murder can also be seen in rape, and in the intentional transmission of AIDS in consensual sexual intercourse. All of these forms of violence are present in *Un dimanche* and the perpetrators are extensive, including Valcourt the protagonist of the story who knowingly leads the wife of a foreign diplomat into the arms of an HIV positive Rwandan who is known for intentionally infecting Western women. One of the greatest strengths of Courtemanche's approach to representing genocide is that the line between good and evil is so blurred that everyone is

implicated in the failure of humanity that allowed so many rapes and murders to occur, and continues to allow AIDS to desolate the country.

This complication of roles of victim and perpetrator can be seen in all aspects of the novel. Each of the characters, even the protagonists, can be seen, to varying degrees, as guilty. Courtemanche moves beyond the plot-line of the characters and points to the failures of multiple nations including France, Belgium, the United States, Canada and the United Nations in general, not just the Hutu rebels, in the years leading up to 1994 and then during the months of genocide. The reader is even portrayed as victim and aggressor, violator and violated. On many occasions Courtemanche leaves his descriptions of characters and groups of people open and encompassing such that the reader can identify. Generalities such as statements about “les Blancs” are risky because they are stereotypical in nature. However, they also leave room for a white, Western, reader to see him or herself in the accusations. For instance, Célestin tries to show the similarities between all humans and explains how “il avait rapidement compris que les Blancs se croyaient supérieurs” (Courtemanche 36). Courtemanche intentionally extends the conflict between the Hutus and Tutsis to all Whites and in turn the reader, cautioning him or her from the beginning not to read the novel from a perspective of superiority.

Moreover, as readers, we violate the characters through our role as spectators of their rape and death. In her compilation of essays regarding voyeurism in literature entitled *Telling Glances*, Dorothy Kelly explains, “It is precisely because of problems of gender identity that the voyeur needs to construct scenes that negotiate ambiguities and contradictions” (Kelly 7). She also draws the logical connection between the sexual

instincts discussed and theorized by Freud and their representations in voyeuristic literature. The secretive nature of watching is as essential as the erotic nature of the action. The progressive relationship between the gaze, knowledge and power is also discussed by Freud who conjectures that epistemophilia, the instinct for knowledge, develops out of scopophilia. Epistemophilia is not a basic component of sexuality according to Freud. He believes that it is a development that follows because “the instinct for knowledge is related to a need to solve sexual problems” and often, “knowledge is as much the goal as the vision itself” (Kelly 9). The relationship is then extended from seeing to knowledge, to domination: ultimately voyeurism is an act of aggression and supremacy in which the readers participate further oppressing the victims of the Rwandan genocide.

In *Voir et Être Vu* Schnyder and Toudoire-Surlapierre also draw a connection between seeing and dominating, but in terms of the desire to destroy the object seen. “La pulsion scopique mène à la destruction de l’image comme pour échapper au risque de voir le retournement contre soi de ce désir pulsionnel” (Schnyer 22). If domination stems from knowledge, then the reader is also a subject of domination of the victims because of his/her voyeuristic behavior. Schnyder discusses “les potentialités tyranniques de la surveillance asymétrique de l’autre” (Schnyder 36) by emphasizing the power one has when having the privileged position of knowledge through the gaze. Kelly explains the relationship between knowledge, sexuality and domination in an apt way:

The instinct for mastery is nonsexual, [but] can fuse with sexuality secondarily to become sadism. Freud describes the instinct for knowledge and the instinct for

mastery in terms of opposites activity/passivity; the aim of the instinct for mastery is actively to dominate or to destroy the object. (Kelly 7)

Due to this complex relationship between the gaze, knowledge, and domination Courtemanche's readers are unavoidably implicated in the genocide, complicit, and part of the failure of humanity, and henceforth cannot maintain an outside position of judgment of the events. Thus, the text gives back the humanity lost to the degrading violence, erasure of personal and collective history, and the obscene and sensationalized images.

Objectification of marginalized people and the legitimization of violence

Visual depictions of the violence as seen in media create the understanding that Western audiences possess of genocide, and they too often reduce the complexity of the situation and even hide the truth behind the events from the viewers. Baudrillard aptly explains the power of the image in the post-modern world: "Habituellement, dans notre univers médiatique, l'image est là à la place de l'événement. Elle s'y substitue, et la consommation de l'image épuise l'événement par procuration" (Baudrillard 21). This replacement of the event by the representations of the event can be dangerous both for the viewers who accept the portrayal of victim and aggressors, and for the victims themselves who are often further degraded. Too often representations of genocide in the media are limited to obscene, degrading, and objectifying images, thus rendering the event itself a spectacle. While these representations are not necessarily inaccurate, they do provide a limited view of genocide and of the people associated with the events, which can conceptually transform people into objects.

This objectification in media is similar to the objectification of people discussed by Aimé Césaire in his discourses on colonization. He states that “radical objectification manifests as [...] contempt, mistrust, arrogance and degraded masses” and allows for “the irrational other [to be] devalued, abused, erased, or exterminated” (Césaire 42). If media representation perpetuates the negative impression of the people in question, it also contributes to the abuse they experience by propagating a lack of concern and self-complacency of the Western viewers, or even just by further degrading the victims themselves. Courtemanche succeeds in demonstrating how genocide is linked to perceived superiority of one group to another. He also illustrates that no group, person or country is outside of blame for similar ways of thinking. The characters in *Un dimanche à la piscine à Kigali* aptly demonstrate the universality of prejudice, the desire for power, and the perception of superiority, all of which lead to the violence that was seen in Rwanda.¹

Johan Galtung also explains this phenomenon through his discussion of cultural violence. Cultural violence, as defined by Galtung, is part of a triad of violence types, which includes structural and direct violence. Direct violence refers to the actual violent actions that occur. Structural violence includes political or economic systems that strive

¹ The relationship between Justin, a Rwandan pool man who worked at the hotel, and the white guests of the hotel demonstrates this universality of prejudice and hatred, and the violence that ensues. Justin had many opportunities to have sexual intercourse with these women because they fantasized about the stereotypes of a hyper-virile and sexual African man. Courtemanche does not only blame the Western women with their stereotypical views and the ways in which they seek to use Justin to fulfill their fantasies, but Justin is also guilty of hatred and violence. “Chaque fois qu’il baisait une Blanche, et il y en avait tellement qui promenaient leur corps incertain, leurs envies dissimulées, leurs fascinations pour le nègre barbare et puissant, chaque fois il se vengeait du fait d’être garçon de piscine et simple objet de convoitise sexuelle de la part des maîtresses. Il se vengeait aussi du fait d’être noir. Il se comportait avec les Blanches comme elles rêvaient qu’il le fasse, en brute animale, puisqu’il n’était pas vraiment un humain” (Courtemanche 171). Justin was sure to take revenge on these objectifying women. After having played to the fantasies of the women he refused to have sexual relations with them, which was his own form of psychological torture; and when he did give into their desires he demonstrated his own hatred for them by intentionally giving them HIV.

to keep a minority group marginalized. A violent structure leaves marks not only on the human body but also on the mind and the spirit. He explains that direct violence is an event; structural violence is a process with ups and downs; cultural violence is an invariant, a 'permanence', which makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right - or at least not wrong. Violence studies are about two problems: the use of violence and the legitimation of that use. Given that these ways of thinking bring about, or at the very least legitimize such violent behaviors, it is absolutely necessary to avoid the perpetuation of such beliefs, which allow for people to become objects and thus held outside the standards of moral treatment. Samantha Powers, in her article *Bystanders of Genocide*, suggests that Western prejudices towards the violent nature of tribal conflict in Africa contributed to the inaction of the United States in preventing or at least limiting the atrocities committed in Rwanda. Therefore, in representing the Rwandan genocide one also has to avoid the objectification of a group of people and the representations must create a bridge between the genocidal behaviors, the implicated persons, the spectators and the readers who often are of Western origin.

Tzvetan Todorov, in the context of the Holocaust, provides a general framework regarding the misconceptions and stereotypes of genocide perpetrators. His work debunks the idea that the genocidal killers were either monsters or savages, which are both stereotypical images of not only the Hutu aggressors in the Rwandan genocide but also Africans and colonized people in general. He argues that monsters do exist but that they are too few in number to be nearly as dangerous as ordinary people. Todorov also believes that the image of savage, primitive people is inadequate because animals would never behave in such a cruel way. Both of these descriptions are often attributed to the

perpetrators of genocide, and especially in Rwanda, as people would like to distance themselves from the events as much as possible. By immediately discounting the potential of distancing oneself from the perpetrators, Todorov requires the reader to self-reflect and at the same time undoes the objectification of the people who commit the crimes. One of the reasons that genocide can occur is because the victims are dehumanized and made into animals, objects, villains, enemies.² It would be counter-productive to create a representation of genocide in which any group of people is given such an identity.

Vice, virtue, and the transgression of stereotypes

Todorov focuses on the everyday person as a perpetrator of genocide because of self-interest, a focus on vital needs, group solidarity that excludes the other, short-term gain, and other completely common human abuses that in extraordinary circumstances become the bases for the decision to follow authority and commit atrocities. In the same way, he also makes the possibility of being a hero more accessible to the ordinary person

² The power of language played a large part in mobilizing the Hutus population to commit the murders of over 800,000 Tutsis during the Rwandan Genocide. During the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, multiple media were put on trial for their direct involvement in the genocide. The private radio station RTLM, established by extremists who surrounded the president, and the newspaper *Kangura* were particularly under scrutiny. The message from RTLM was unmistakable: the Tutsi were to blame; they were the enemy and Rwanda would be better off without them. Alison Des Forges incites a quotation from RTLM transcripts from June 3 1994. The term *inyenzi* used by the announcer is the Kinyarwanda equivalent of cockroach. “The cruelty of the *inyenzi* can be cured only by their total extermination” (Thompson 50). The *Kangura* also used fear-inducing hate speech and referred to the Tutsis as cockroaches. This is similar to Nazi propaganda during World War II, like *The Eye of Vichy*, which referred to the Jewish population as vermin. This de-humanizing language leads to objectification and devaluation that ultimately legitimizes acts of violence.

by changing the definition of what it means to be a hero. Todorov discusses two different types of virtues: heroic and ordinary. Heroic virtues are those of strength, courage, loyalty as seen in superheroes, fictional heroes, and war heroes. These virtues require a person to have super-human qualities and are historically most necessary in war. Yet, Todorov argues that as war has changed heroic virtues are less necessary, and he even says that the literary representations of heroes with heroic virtues do not necessarily give the ordinary person a good example of how one should act to be a hero in everyday life. Todorov values ordinary virtue, which is made up of three parts: dignity, caring, and life of the mind. Dignity can be like self-respect and suggests that remaining moral and human, is more important than staying alive. Dignity requires the means to be moral, too, and people cannot simply be used as a means to an end. Dignity means fighting against injustice. Caring is always moral as it does not exclude. Caring occurs towards a person, not an abstract idea, but it also does not exclude anyone who is in need. It is important to differentiate caring with solidarity, the “we-ism” that Levi discusses that is really not much different than self-interest; it is group-interest. Finally, ordinary virtue is also comprised of the life of the mind- literature, arts, ethical discussions etc. The life of the mind helps keep a person human.

One can see evidence of all three aspects of ordinary virtue in the characters in *Un dimanche*, as well as failure in these areas. Courtemanche represents his victims and perpetrators in terms of ordinary human successes and failures, and consequently allows the characters to remain human rather than objectified victims or perpetrators. Additionally, as Todorov also extols, in any given moment the characters can be both a victim and a perpetrator. This is one of the strongest aspects of these texts- complicating

the binary view of guilt forces the reader to reflect on his/her own prejudices, judgments, and actions.

Courtemanche also succeeds in demonstrating the Rwandan genocide as a failure of humanity as a whole. His hybrid novel, which incorporates fiction and a journalistic account of events, allows him to also implicate international actors. In each of Courtemanche's characters one can see the presence and absence of what Todorov refers to as ordinary virtues. The main character Bernard struggles moment to moment between behaving with self-interest, group-interest, or in favor of an abstract ideal like the well-being of Rwanda and acting with dignity to not exploit his friends in favor of his story as a journalist or caring for Gentile who he could have saved. Bernard, a Canadian journalist living in Rwanda during the time of the genocide wants to stay in order to speak out about the atrocities being committed and the lack of international support fighting against them. He believes it is important to capture the truth and provide a testimony of it to the world, which he has the ability to do as a journalist. However, by staying until the very end he puts the life of Gentile, whom he loves and marries in Kigali, in danger. Gentile is half Tutsi- half Hutu, but because she looks like a Tutsi she is considered one and at the mercy of the Hutus who are ready to kill. Bernard, as a Canadian journalist, has the ability to save her life by leaving the country with her as his wife, but he does not do so because he wants to stay for the good of all the people in Rwanda. This seemingly heroic act ends up indirectly killing Gentile. In addition, there is mixed-motivation as Bernard also just loves Rwanda and had imagined spending his life there. This is a perfect example of conflicting values, self-interest and ordinary decisions that in an extreme situation mean the difference between life and death.

There are countless examples where Todorov's ordinary virtues are upheld or lose to self-interest, fear, or immediate gain. Victor, a restaurant owner, does all in his power to bring Tutsis to the boarder as long as he could. The US diplomat, however, tells the Rwandan prime minister to leave her property and thus causes her to be killed. The diplomat valued her physical life over her moral life. One of the most powerful examples, however, is the way in which the life of the mind plays a role in the story of Gentile. Gentile could not read or write and felt very limited in her ability to express herself. Bernard had a copy of the poems of Paul Eluard³ and taught Gentile how to read them. Throughout the story Gentile held onto the poems as a ray of hope, a means to stay strong through the fear and violence, and she even found her own voice through the poems. She transformed from an object of beauty stared at by the foreign and local men to a subject of her own life and story. After she was continually raped and beaten during the genocide, she wrote about her experiences in a journal. This is how Bernard eventually learned what had happened to her. She provided her own testimony. She was able to bear witness and thus regain some control of her own life. She had been violated, but at the very least she could speak out against it and tell her story. She was not simply a voiceless victim. This is an integral part of the success of Courtemanche's text. He transgresses stereotypes, complicates traditionally ascribed roles, and preserves the voice and thus role of subject of the victims.

³ In addition to being a successful poet, Eluard was also a member of the French Communist Party who wrote about political and social ideals and in favor of resistance against the Nazi Party. The book of Eluard poems that Valcourt had brought with him to Rwanda, which became a pivotal part of Gentile's transformation, was the complete works of Eluard, which would certainly include his political writings of resistance. Courtemanche makes reference specifically to verses found in *Le dur désir de durer*, which is a compilation of poems treating the difficulty of living fully after the German occupation. Eluard's poems provide a voice for the need to continue and resist the hatred of genocide, which is symbolic of Gentile's struggle and her own personal growth through her reading of the poems.

There is always the risk that texts which intend to denounce violence actually further degrade or de-humanize victims and end up being an act of violence themselves. In representing violence such as genocide it is important, of course, to consider the purpose and goal of the project. Truth, memory and prevention certainly seem like ultimately moral goals, yet as Todorov mentions, people cannot be sacrificed for a worthy end. Moral indignation can be expressed in more constructive ways such as demonstrating the potential for such evil acts in all of humanity so that people look to transform prejudices and cultural violence such that direct violence cannot be legitimized. While the contexts were different in both of these genocidal periods, the ultimate failure of humanity was similar. Many people contributed to the effective slaughter of hundreds of thousands of people, which could have been prevented or at least limited.

Respect in memory

In order to show respect to the victims it is important to remember what happened yet, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak suggests, the people's dignity should not be compromised in these representations. Another way in which the media's images and accounts of genocidal violence show questionable ethics, in terms of responsible representation, is the shock value that is sought. The act of sensationalizing the events to gain viewer attention makes the events less accessible to human understanding. Thus, it allows and encourages the viewer to distance him/herself from the events, relinquishing responsibility to act or even care:

Tout est dans le premier instant. Tout se trouve conjugué immédiatement, dans le choc des extrêmes. Et si on escamote ce moment de stupéfaction, d'admiration-immoral certes, mais où se trouve condensée, à travers l'immortalité de l'image, l'intuition stupéfiante de l'événement, si on récuse ce moment-là, on perd toute

possibilité de comprendre. Si la première pensée est de dire : cela est monstrueux, cela est inacceptable, alors toute intensité, tout l'impact de l'événement se perd dans les considérations politiques et morales. Tous les discours nous éloignent irrévocablement de l'événement et nous ne pourrions plus jamais nous en rapprocher. (Baudrillard 19-20)

In the context of genocide, the victims become nothing more than objects of horror, and the aggressors are reduced to villains. Both are far removed from the reality of Western existences. They are dehumanized and replaced by simplified images of helpless, worthless sufferer, and evil incarnate. These images are far easier to accept for the Western audience. Baudrillard asserts that "l'image sert de refuge imaginaire contre l'événement. C'est une forme d'évasion" (21). He further explains, however, that "dans ce sens, elle (the image itself) est une violence faite à l'événement" (22). The simplified representations of genocide portrayed by the monstrous images of body parts and corpses erases the complexity of the hate and the murders. This parallels the act of genocide in that the degradation of the person results in their objectification, which ultimately allows for him/her to be exterminated. Additionally, the emotional distancing that occurs on the part of the viewers, due to the fact that genocide is represented as a crime outside of the realm normal human possibility, further perpetuates the negative stereotypes of the perpetrators and the victims.

Unfortunately, Western representations of the violence that occurs in African countries and other developing countries are little more than propaganda supporting the superiority of the Western world and the inferiority of Africa and Africans who are responsible for the genocide. Aedín Ní Loingsigh, in her article *Lying to tell the truth: fiction and the Rwandan genocide in Véronique Tadjo's L'Ombre d'Imana*, states:

Qualifications such as “savage”, “barbaric” and “senseless”, which were frequently used to describe the violence, pointed to a particular Western bias in portrayals of African identity and underlined a reluctance to examine events within the context of Rwanda’s complex history. Although the violence was frequently branded as incredible, it was also treated as known and inevitable, and consequently unworthy of much attention. (Milne 83)

This explanation helps us understand that by painting a negative picture of a group of people the representation of violence can further stereotypes and can even lead to violence as stereotypes and prejudices in art and literature make up the cultural violence discussed by Galtung, which legitimizes direct violence. In the following famous quotation Arthur Koestler brings to our attention the fact that language itself is a weapon that can cause much harm. He states, “Wars are not fought for territory, but for words. Man's deadliest weapon is language. He is susceptible to being hypnotized by slogans as he is to infectious diseases. And where there is an epidemic, the group mind takes over” (Thompson 308). This astute explanation of wherein lies the real weapon also implies the possibility that acts of extreme violence could occur anywhere, with anyone as the antagonist. This is a concept that is maintained and further developed in Courtemanche’s hybrid novel *Un dimanche à la piscine à Kigali*. The narrator states:

Nous pouvons tous nous transformer en assassins, avait toujours soutenu Valcourt, même l’être le plus pacifique et le plus généreux. Il suffit de quelques circonstances, d’un déclic, d’une faillite, d’un patient conditionnement, d’une colère, d’une déception. Le prédateur préhistorique, le guerrier primitif vivent encore sous les vernis successifs que la civilisation a appliqués sur l’humain. Chacun possède dans ses gènes toute le Bien et tout le Mal de l’humanité. (Courtemanche 136)

This notion that everyone possesses the possibility for good and evil reclaims the humanity in situations of genocide; the extreme violence occurs because of an extreme,

complex situation, not because Africans, or Germans or Cambodians, are particularly evil.

Pornography of horror demanding reflection, not inciting pleasure or shock

Gil Courtemanche succeeds in his goal to breakdown these dangerous misconceptions about guilt and innocence by emphasizing the culpability of the world and not simply the Hutus. He also achieves an important level of respect for the victims by offering them a voice and giving the characters an identity that transcends their victimization. Nevertheless, in *Un dimanche à la piscine à Kigali*, Courtemanche treats the subjects of genocide and AIDS without avoiding the graphic details that are so difficult to read. At times in his text he crosses the line and enters into the realm of pornography- both sexual and violent. This is especially true because of the literary devices he employs to create voyeuristic scenes and as such, he is criticized by critical texts like that of Harting who believes that Courtemanche is not sensitive to the violence that is connected to the gaze.

Fanon discusses this violence of the gaze and he warns that the gaze of the “whites” on the “blacks” continues to transform black people into objects and victims. However, Courthemanche plays with the power of the gaze and uses it in order to implicate the reader in the violence acts of genocide. The culpability of numerous actors including individuals, the Hutu government, Western nations and the reader him or herself, is placed under scrutiny in his text as he complicates the typical binary roles where people are either victims or perpetrators.

According to *Un dimanche à la piscine à Kigali*, the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, that had begun decades before, was a failure of humanity in which everyone was both

guilty of and victimized by hatred. This idea is evident throughout his text and it becomes easy to see how the gaze of the West on Rwanda was a violent force in this situation of genocide. In his description of the foreigners at the hotel, Valcourt states, “il faudrait bien inventer un mot pour ces Blancs qui parlent, rient, et boivent pour que la piscine prenne conscience de leur importance” (Courtemanche 16). The word chosen for these men is noise and Courtemanche explains, “Le bruit est leur respiration, le silence, est leur mort, et le cul des Rwandaises, leur territoire d’exploration. Ce sont des explorateurs bruyants du tiers-cul” (Courtemanche 16). This graphic image points to the idea of a violent gaze of the Western world on Rwanda.

Courtemanche established from the beginning of his novel that there was hatred, judgments and violence in the gazes of foreigners living in Kigali and Western countries. Thus, his use of graphic and violent language and images later in the text allows him to include the readers in his accusations of guilt and force them not to self-distance from the cruel events. An example of this violent language that takes the reader captive is when Cyprien explains in graphic detail what would happen to Gentille if she was caught by the Hutus.

Ils ne regarderont pas ta carte, ils verront tes fesses, tes jambes, tes seins, ta peau pale et ils se feront la Tutsie et ils appelleront leurs amis pour qu’ils se la fassent aussi. Et toi, tu seras allongée dans la boue rouge, les jambes écartées, une machette sur la gorge, et ils te prendront, dix fois, cent fois, jusqu’à ce que tes blessures et ta douleur fassent disparaître ta beauté. Et quand les blessures, les meurtrissures, le sang séché t’auront enlaidie, quand tu ne seras plus qu’un souvenir de femme, ils te jetteront dans le marais et tu y agoniseras rongée par les insectes, grignotée par les rats ou déchiquetée par les buses. (Courtemanche 121)

The reader cannot escape his or her visceral response to these long, segmented sentences whose style enhances the anxious and disturbed reception of the graphic language.

Likewise, with the scenes of rape and murder of Georgina and Cyprien for example, or the death of Méthode, the reader, in witnessing such private and humbling moments, participates in the degradation of the victims, which was a genocidal tool of the Hutus. Having been implicated in the violence as such, he must then reflect on his own thoughts, beliefs, and his role in the propagation of stereotypes and prejudices.

The many faces of murder

Courtemanche's notion that everyone possesses in his/her genes all the good and all the bad of humanity is demonstrated in the complexity of his characters and the fact that they are presented as both victim and aggressor. Cyprien, while not one of the protagonists in the text, did serve an important role in *Un dimanche à la piscine à Kigali*; he presented the complexities of guilt associated with AIDS. The reader sympathizes with Cyprien because he is presented as a kind, generally "good" person who has contracted AIDS. He contracted HIV because of his ignorance about the disease: "Dieu ne me punira pas parce que ma femme et moi, on voulait avoir du plaisir. Vous voyez, c'est un accident" (Courtemanche 110). Rather than understanding a scientific explanation for how HIV is spread, it is evident that he understands AIDS to be a consequence of sin and a punishment for bad people, which in this instance means black people. This belief plays a part in genocidal rhetoric because it establishes a concept of inferiority and lack of worth of a group of people. Such a way of thinking is a failure in education by his own government and Western organizations whose mission is to help alleviate the rapid spread of AIDS in African nations. Unfortunately, AIDS is not discussed in Rwanda because it is considered a shameful disease that must be silenced. "Le gouvernement niait ses propres statistiques. Les sidéens vivaient dans l'opprobre, la

honte, la dissimulation, le mensonge” (Courtemanche 33). This silence further kills the citizens because they end up contracting AIDS due to limited understandings or misunderstandings. In this way, Cyprien is a victim of the silence associated with AIDS and the prejudices carried against people who are sick with the disease.

However, the silence of shame and prejudice is not the only enemy in AIDS as a second genocide; Cyprien is also represented as a killer. “Cyprien était sidéen, mais personne ne le savait, même pas sa femme, de telle sorte que les deux derniers enfants aussi étaient séropositifs” (Courtemanche 108). He is no longer simply a victim of silence and ignorance. Cyprien passed AIDS onto his family because he was also silent. He selfishly wanted to avoid shame and continue to experience the pleasures of intercourse without concern of the consequences of his actions. However, his crime is described in even stronger terms than just his choice to remain silent about his disease. Élise, a Westerner in Rwanda who worked to fight the spread of AIDS, says to Cyprien, “Tu es un assassin. Toutes ces femmes, tu les tues” (Courtemanche 126). Élise makes the claim that he willfully chooses to kill other women by giving them AIDS. She places the responsibility on him to have the knowledge and morality necessary not to perpetuate the problem. He chooses pleasure instead and sleeps with numerous women without using protection. As such, he takes on the persona of any other killer who does not value life.

Courtemanche adds yet another element to the complexity of AIDS used as a weapon, both by and against Cyprien: the context of the racial genocide by Hutus against the Tutsis. Cyprien explains that it is not a matter of valuing life or not, but rather preferring to die from AIDS than by the brutal murder of the machete. “Ce pays était condamné, croyait-il, à disparaître. Que ce soit la machette ou la queue infectée qui fasse

le travail, quelle différence? Oui, il y en avait une, la queue était plus douce que la machette” (Courtemanche 126). With this explanation the reader feels compassion for Cyprien again. He is not an evil person who wishes to cause others to suffer, but rather he has abandoned all hope and is choosing the death of least pain. These varying, multifaceted portrayals of AIDS and of Cyprien function to make the reader question his or her prior conceptions of good and bad and underlines the fact that people and other aspects of life are rarely one or the other.

Méthode is another character who is also presented in this complex way of being both victim and aggressor; he knowingly transmits HIV to other women but only because he wants to live out the rest of his life fully. Méthode died in the hotel room of Valcourt surrounded by loved ones. However, the employees of the hotel did not want to work on Méthode’s floor. They did not want to have to clean his room, and the manager of the hotel was displeased that he was dying there. Even in his dying moments he is reduced to the shame and fear associated with his disease. And, even though his friends are present, they see Méthode’s death as an inconvenience. “Raphaël et Valcourt auraient préféré que Méthode soit déjà mort” (Courtemanche 62). The reader sympathizes with this dying man, until Agathe engages in oral sex with Méthode, and Méthode is again presented as a killer who transmits AIDS.

Human nature

Courtemanche espouses the idea that everyone has the potential to behave in the monstrous ways described in the acts of genocide. However, he does not go so far as to say that humans are inherently evil. He demonstrates how people are taught to behave

badly, and different circumstances result in different behaviors. He explains that the Hutus who are now assassins killing and violating the Tutsis were once just children who were taught through mechanisms of fear and manipulation to behave that way.

Ils n'ont entendu et appris qu'une leçon: le Tutsi est un insecte qu'il faut piétiner. Sinon, le Tutsi enlève ta femme, il viole tes enfants, il empoisonne l'eau et l'air. La Tutsie, elle, ensorcelle ton mari avec ses fesses. Quand j'étais tout petit, on m'a dit que les Tutsis me tueraient si je ne le faisais pas avant. (Courtemanche 122)

Thus, the real enemy is the propagation of hatred rather than the specific people who have fallen prey to the false teachings. In a conversation between Valcourt and the head of the Tutsi party Courtemanche advocates that this hatred is not something intrinsic in Hutu, but is rather a universal evil that is part of the long-standing ethnic conflict. The head of the Tutsi party states that he is just like them, meaning the Hutu. Confused, Valcourt argues "tu n'as rien en commun avec ces gens" (Courtemanche 142). However, the chief responds and explains,

Au contraire. Nous sommes tous des Rwandais, prisonniers de la même histoire tordue qui a fait de nous à la fois des paranoïaques et des schizophrènes. Joli mélange. Et comme eux, je suis né rempli de haine et de préjugés. Comprends-tu ? Ce que je dis, c'est que, si les Tutsis contrôlaient l'armée comme au Burundi, nous les tuerions tous, ces Hutus. Moi, le premier. (Courtemanche 142)

The chief does not hesitate to place himself among the murderers, which truly demonstrates the complexity of hate and prejudice in the ethnic conflict and brings to question that which is good and evil.

This reconsideration of the nature of people and of extreme cases of violence is further developed with Courtemanche's multi-faceted portrayal of his protagonists.

Valcourt and Gentille are the prominent characters of the story, and while both demand the sympathy of the reader, they are certainly not without their faults. Valcourt, especially, does not benefit from the heroic status often attributed to the protagonist. He teeters on the side of antagonist on multiple occasions. Right at the beginning of the text Valcourt's complex and almost contradictory role and identity is highlighted. "Il décrit la scène et exprime son indignation, ajoutant quelques notes sur les horreurs de la corruption africaine, mais il ne bouge pas" (Courtemanche 18). This citation demonstrates that Valcourt is guilty of inaction, and thus, his indignation is reduced to arrogance rather than genuine, ethical concern. He takes the place of an outsider who looks in and judges, a role that is not all together different than that of other westerners in Africa and outside of Africa who do very little to help the people who are suffering from injustice.

Valcourt is a Canadien who is living in Kigali in order to make a film about AIDS. However, his humanitarian intentions are called into question. Méthode, who is on his death bed because of AIDS, says to Valcourt, "je vais te faire un bon film qui va te rendre riche" (Courtemanche 76). Valcourt is a friend of Méthode, and it does not seem that there is any malice in this statement. However, Méthode's words still imply exploitation associated with humanitarian aid, and include Valcourt as someone who seeks personal gain at the expense of victims. Furthermore, despite his seemingly good intentions, Valcourt often demonstrates his own Western prejudices of the Rwandan people. Valcourt is romantically interested in Gentille but is hesitant to have a relationship with her because he says that she is a little girl. She has to explain to him that she has already seen and experienced so much, and that in Rwanda her age of twenty-two

is considered much older. This shows Valcourt's ignorance of the culture and also his prejudice against the Gentille. He has trouble seeing her as an equal, but in terms of life experience she has probably far exceeded him. However, Valcourt tries to impose his own ideas about age and maturity and sees Gentille as inferior.

Valcourt's narrow view of the Rwandan people is also demonstrated in the way in which he perceives the victims of AIDS. "Valcourt ne voyait pas des enfants, il observait des morts en sursis. Sans trop s'en rendre compte, il cherchait sur leur visage des indices, des signes de leur maladie" (Courtemanche 111). While he was living in Kigali for the purpose of revealing the truths about AIDS, he fell victim to the prejudices against people who were living with AIDS. He reduced them to their disease, which is a form of the objectification and degradation that were at the root of the genocide. Cyprien accuses Valcourt of this prejudiced behavior. He says, "vous nous regardez comme des primitifs ou des inconscients" (Courtemanche 117). Cyprien notices this behavior despite the fact that he is a friend of Valcourt, and in the text it is apparent that Valcourt genuinely cares about him. For example, after Cyprien and his wife were murdered Valcourt adopts Cyprien's daughter. Valcourt is presented as kind and caring even in his weaknesses. He is a character who genuinely hates the evil that causes the violence, but cannot completely escape it himself, which further demonstrates the complexity of the situation.

Courtemanche does not present a typical, idealistic, fictional love story experienced by two protagonists, but instead he fully demonstrates the complicated nature of the relationship between Valcourt and Gentille. He does so as part of his discourse on the complexity of extreme situations of genocide and of humanity in general. The relationship between Gentille and Valcourt demonstrates that in situations of

genocide nothing can escape the evil and remain pure. Their romance is tainted by selfishness and objectification. Gentille believes that Valcourt is unlike the other foreigners who see her simply as a sex object. However, Valcourt admits that he is no better than the others: “je ne suis pas totalement différent des clients de la piscine. Moi aussi, j’ai envie...j’ai envie de toi” (Courtemanche 52). He goes on to lust over her physical beauty and discuss the sexual desires he possesses. Gentille is reduced to her legs, her breasts, her buttocks. This objectification is similar to the reductionist images that too often represent the violence associated with genocide. She is stripped of her value as a person, which contributes to an overall devaluation of women: another example of cultural violence that could serve to legitimize unjust treatment and masculine domination, perhaps even rape.

Bourdieu discusses the deep societally ingrained beliefs that lead to such domination in his text *La domination masculine*. He argues that our social order supports masculine domination, which Courtemanche also highlights in his text. He draws the parallel between colonialism, racism and sexism in expounding on how the world is made up of arbitrary divisions put into opposition. In the same way that society supports masculine domination, it also supports racial domination, class domination, and even religious domination. These justifications of one group dominating over another fall into the category of cultural violence as defined by Galtung and can lead to acts of direct violence. Also in line with Bourdieu’s theories on masculine domination, Gentille sees herself as a sexual object. Unjust, objectifying ideas are so pervasive in society that she has assumed them into her psyche. Gentille is hurt in the beginning of the novel when Courtemanche does not have sexual intercourse with her. She believes that to mean he

does not like her and that she is not good enough. She has fully assumed the role of victim and perpetuates her own domination. This can also be seen by the fact that Gentille refuses to leave the country without Valcourt, which ultimately leads to her torture, rape and death.

Nevertheless, true to Courtemanche's pattern of breaking down stereotypical identities, Gentille is not only given a role of victim in the text; she is also guilty of objectifying Valcourt. She reduces him to the symbolic, rich, White man. "Elle voulait le Blanc, un Blanc comme tous les autres. Promesse de richesse, de visa pour l'étranger peut-être" (Courtemanche 54). Here Valcourt takes his turn as the victim of objectification, and he is hurt because he feels used. "Gentille, je ne veux pas être le Blanc qui fait des cadeaux, expliqua Valcourt. Si tu veux partir, je peux bien t'aider à obtenir un visa, mais tu n'as pas besoin de coucher avec moi. Même si cela peut te paraître ridicule, je voudrais seulement que tu m'aimes un peu" (Courtemanche 54). Courtemanche does not leave the relationship in this superficial state. As the story progresses, so does their love. They each have the opportunity to see the value of the other rather than just objectifying each other based on surface level standards. Still, at first, they too fall prey to the mechanisms of judgment and degradation that are in control of daily life in Kigali.

International accomplices

Courtemanche also implicates the governments of Rwanda and other nations as antagonists in the story of genocide; he refuses to accept that anyone involved in genocide is truly innocent. As mentioned, Valcourt holds the belief that everyone

possesses the capacity to become agents of evil in extreme situations: “nous pouvons tous nous transformer en assassins [...] même l’être le plus pacifique et le plus généreux”⁴ (Courtemanche 136). He also maintains that, in addition to individuals, all nations have weaknesses that contribute to promoting these situations of extreme violence. He states, “chez moi, la maladie, c’est la complaisance. En France, c’est la suffisance, et aux États-Unis, l’ignorance” (Courtemanche 182). In this quotation Valcourt brings attention to variations of the structural violence that are present in western countries. In doing so, he suggests a similarity between Rwanda and its violence and other more “developed” nations who also have a latent violence and whose own prejudices contributed to the genocide in Rwanda. France, Canada, and the United States share a cultural and structural violence that believes certain people to be inferior and works to keep them in these marginalized situations, as do the Hutus during the genocide. The accusation that these countries are implicated in the violence in Rwanda through their arrogance, complacency or ignorance is not something that is easily accepted by a Western audience. However, it is necessary for Courtemanche to insist on this reality in order to force the reader to interact differently with the text and also to understand the nature of genocide in a different way. Toonder states, “Real-life experiences that are given shape in fiction result in an increased awareness of humanness; the fictional form affects readers’ empathy more than bare facts, however appalling they are” (Milne 105). The image of genocide in Courtemanche’s text does not allow the reader to distance him/herself from the atrocities

⁴ Sigmund Freud also discusses this capacity for evil in extreme situations in the context of his work on the death instinct. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, he argues that part of this death instinct, which is inherent in all people, is also an inclination toward aggressiveness and destruction. Freud’s theory is controversial and perhaps more extreme than Courtemanche’s assertion. Yet, both touch on the basic principle that the atrocities committed in the Rwandan genocide are unfortunately compatible with human nature and thus not specific to a “savage Africa” as stereotypes might propose.

in the same way that sensationalized media images do. The Rwandan genocide is no longer just a story of evil Africans killing other helpless Africans.

Because of the hybrid nature of the novel, a mixture of fiction and a chronicle account, Courtemanche is able to highlight specific ways that these western powers participated in the genocide. He examines the military support offered to the Hutus and the lack of support offered to the Tutsi, and the silence and indifference internationally in response to what was happening. Courtemanche states that the Rwandan troops were supported by the French through training and the supply of weapons; he even makes reference to a “grenade française” (Courtemanche 7). Additionally, Courtemanche underlines the fact that none of the world’s powers had any intention of coming to the aid of the millions of people who were being raped and killed by the Hutu soldiers. Even the Belgian and United Nation troops who were already on site would not use force to defend the Rwandan people. In *Un dimanche à la piscine à Kigali*, when the United Nation’s officer is asked what he will do if there is an ethnic cleansing he responds,

Rien, monsieur, rien. Je ne dispose pas des forces nécessaires pour intervenir. On me les refuse. Nous protégerions les édifices et les personnes des nations unies et peut-être les expatriés, si cela ne met pas la vie de nos soldats en danger. Pour le reste, c’est un problème entre Rwandais. (Courtemanche 150)

This explanation that he does not have the necessary soldiers nor is he able to put his soldiers at risk for the Rwandans does not hold up as plausible. The reader is told that it would actually require very little help in terms of the number of troops required to stop the Hutus from killing the Tutsi population. “L’armée rwandaise n’était qu’une triste farce. Quelques centaines de soldats professionnels pouvaient prendre le contrôle de la capitale en quelques heures. L’ONU n’avait pas besoin de renforts, seulement d’un leader

audacieux sur le terrain” (Courtemanche 151). Courtemanche makes it clear that it was entirely possible for the United Nations or other military presence to stop the genocide had they decided to do so, which raises the question of Western nations’ complicity to genocide and, thus, their culpability.

Complicity to genocide, which includes the lack of action to prevent violence when one has the capacity to do so, is punishable according to Article 3 of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the crime of Genocide, which was adopted by the United Nations on December 9, 1948⁵. In signing the document, each nation and individual agreed to the moral responsibility to intervene in cases of genocide. However, the unwillingness of the West to classify the killings as genocide complicated the issue. Foreign nations are not required to intervene in civil conflict, and in doing so could actually infringe upon the rights to sovereignty of the nation in question. Additionally, the United Nation and Belgian troops that were in Rwanda at the time that the genocide occurred were not even allowed to act offensively or use force to prevent the killings. These limitations present a challenge in determining whether or not foreign militaries can be considered complicit to genocide. If they are not allowed to act, can they be held responsible for not intervening?

Courtemanche also brings to question the culpability associated with the silence and the indifference of foreign governments and people. From the beginning of the novel he demonstrates the lack of sincere foreign concern. The foreign government workers and other ex-patriots spend their time in the fancy hotel up on the hill that seems to symbolize

⁵ This is from the “UN Resolution 260- 1948, On Genocide” found at U.N.T.S. No. 1021, vol. 78 (1951), p. 277.

the dominion of Western powers in Rwanda. They are portrayed as selfish and most of the men treat the Rwandan women as sexual objects. This first group of foreigners who seem to be indifferent to the fate of the Rwandan people leaves Rwanda at the start of the genocide. They are no longer witness to the atrocities. As they flee to their personal safety, they also flee from the position of knowing the truth and the ensued responsibility for acting or speaking out because of that knowledge.

Even after the novel's foreign characters escape the scene, Courtemanche continues to underscore the silence and indifference of foreigners through his decision to incorporate commentary on the media's failures and the general public's disinterest. He brings to attention the western media's lack of appropriate coverage with the following citation.

L'hôtel commençait à boire sa piscine. CNN, dans son grand bulletin international, évoqua durant vingt secondes la reprise des problèmes ethniques au Rwanda, tout en assurant que les ressortissants étrangers étaient en sécurité. Même la perspicace BBC n'en dit pas beaucoup plus. Radio France internationale parlait d'affrontements récurrents, de tribalismes ancestraux, se demandant si jamais les Africains pourraient se libérer de leurs anciens démons qui provoquaient les pires atrocités. (Courtemanche 289)

While this quote seems harsh and perhaps fictionalized to emphasize the point, Courtemanche did not stray from the truth in his account of the media's response to the Rwandan genocide.

For the first couple of months of the genocide little attention was given by the West because the atrocities were portrayed as tribal warfare rather than genocide. The United States government determined that the murders in Rwanda were genocide in mid-May, but it was not until the beginning of the June that the term genocide was used in the

media (Donoghue). On May 24, 1994 the United Nations Human Rights Commission had an emergency meeting to discuss Rwanda at which they heard direct testimony of the genocide, and on May 31 the Security Council officially acknowledged genocide (Thompson 239-40). It was not until June 10, 1994 when Secretary of State Warren Christopher finally publicly admitted that the Rwandan slaughter was in fact “genocide” (Powers). However the typical rhetoric, and that used by President Clinton, was “acts of genocide”, which reduces the severity of the situation. This unwillingness to define the violence as genocide could be explained as an attempt by the United States to avoid the responsibility to act in situations of genocide mandated by the 1948 Convention on Genocide.

In April when the killings began, much of the international coverage focused on the scramble to evacuate expatriates from the country and most journalists had left along with the other foreigners. In mid-April, when the killing intensified, the volume of news reports actually declined. Dallaire explains that,

While the killing raged on in Rwanda, the O.J. Simpson case dominated the airwaves. Tonya Harding's kneecapping of her figure skating competitor was there as well. You had Nelson Mandela's election in South Africa. You had Yugoslavia. And, oh yes, somewhere in there, a bunch of black tribesmen in Africa were killing each other. During the 100 days of the Rwanda genocide, there was more coverage of Tonya Harding by ABC, CBS and NBC than of the genocide itself. Was that because of a love of pathos? Was it because of the excitement? Was it because the Harding story was on CNN's radar screen? Or was it the hand of someone above, guiding the media and getting across the subtle message, 'Listen, we have absolutely no interest in going into another hellhole in Africa. We do not want to get involved in Rwanda. So don't get us involved.' (Thompson 15)

In addition to indicating a failure of the media to bring attention to the genocide in Rwanda, this quotation perfectly demonstrates the interests of the United States public. Many people wonder if the world would have reacted differently if it were confronted daily by images of people being slaughtered rather than the static, disembodied pictures of disfigured corpses. It is thought that more informed and comprehensive coverage of the Rwanda genocide, particularly in those early days, might well have mitigated or even halted the killing by sparking an international outcry. However, not only is it impossible to prove that increased media coverage from the beginning would have sparked action against the genocide, there is much evidence that suggests that the public would have just continued in their indifference. Courtemanche goes so far as to present the claim that the Whites do not care at all. Valcourt remarks, “*Quel idiot je suis! Il faut dix mille morts africaines pour faire sourciller un Blanc, même s’il est progressiste. Dix mille, ce n’est même pas assez. Et puis ce ne sont pas de belles morts. Elles font honte à l’humanité*” (Courtemanche 147). In his commentary on the disinterest of the whites about Africans dying, he also comments on the type of pictures about which people do care. He states,

Les victimes de la sécheresse, les petits ventres ballonnés, les yeux plus grands que la télé, les enfants tragiques de la famine et des éléments, ceux-là émeuvent. Mais quand ce sont des hommes comme nous qui tuent d’autres hommes comme nous et qu’ils le font brutalement, avec les moyens du bord, on se voile la face. Et quand ce sont des hommes inutiles, comme ceux d’ici. (Courtemanche 148)

However, the way in which the touching pictures move people is still described as limited to a superficial humanitarian aid: rich people form groups in order to give money to the unfortunate, helpless Africans.

Through Valcourt's commentary, Courtemanche is able to participate in a larger debate over the ethical representation of violence and the lack of concern of the Western public in the Rwandan genocide. This is a perfect example of how the hybridity of his novel permits him to masterfully incorporate firsthand accounts and a broader philosophical and ethical debate into his story of fiction that is based on real people and real events. Journalist Edgar Roski participates in the same conversation in his November of 1994 article published in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, in which he states that the Rwandan genocide was "a genocide without images" (Thompson 238). More precisely, though, his criticism was not only on the lack of images but also the type of images represented. Towards the very end of the genocide the international media reports on Rwanda were abounding with obscene, shocking images of body part and corpses strewn about. However, there were no other known images of the crime itself, the crime of genocide. In his chapter of Thompson's *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, Roski has a translated reprint of his autumn 1994 article in which he quotes Jean-Michel Turpin:

Writers can do their jobs more discreetly, but when you work with a camera, you have to get up very close to your subjects and look them in the face. You have to get into some positions that are going to be grotesque. But that day, I had just seen this poor little kid grab onto a television reporter's pant leg, and the reporter's reaction was to whip out his point-and-shoot and take a close-up of the kid just hanging on there. This guy wasn't even a cameraman, he was just somebody who does stand-ups and talks into a microphone. He didn't need that photo for anything – he was just taking it for a souvenir. Who could want a souvenir like that? Then half a second later, I saw a photographer who was almost sitting on top of a dead child to get a shot. He obviously hadn't realized it, but at that point, I had had enough. (Roski 241)

Reporters such as Turpin and Roski are clearly, and rightfully, uncomfortable with the exploitative, insensitive ways in which people take and show pictures of violence.

Nevertheless, the shock value goal of photography has been fully embraced both by media and by NGOs because it sells to the general public. Roski equates the representation of genocide to a marketplace and in so doing implies questionable morality. However, he also questions the ultimate effectiveness of the images. While obscene pornographic-like images gain attention because they shock the public, he argues that “at best these images of the dead and dying attract our charity. They don't keep us from living or even from sleeping at night” (Thompson 240). He then more pointedly attacks the morality of the photographic representations with his comment that the images “don't keep the people who take these pictures from winning awards”, and he asks, “What would we think of a Pulitzer Prize won at Auschwitz” (Thompson 240). This profiteering behavior is also present in *Un dimanche* through the character of Valcourt who is in Rwanda to make a documentary on AIDS. As earlier mentioned, the possible ethical complications with the potential exploitation of people were underlined by Méthode who said that he would make Valcourt rich because of the film. The challenge is that genocide is obscene, and the decision to protect the images and people by choosing not to show them is also problematic. There is a very delicate balance that must be achieved.

Roski, like Courtemanche, questions the efficacy in the representations of genocide and highlights the continued indifference of the international public. As a journalist himself, he does place significant responsibility on the role of the media in shaping public opinion, and it seems that in the case of Rwanda there was a failure to justly represent the violence.

Unfortunately, in our mental image of the world, the African dead remain eternally remote and exotic, and we want to be kept blind to the circumstances in which they were murdered. And that is what pictures do: they hide as much as they show. (Thompson 247)

This paradoxical relationship between giving information and actually saying nothing is also a theme in Courtemanche's text. Even in the beginning of the book, he specifically discusses the amount of noise that the foreigners make. He describes their noise as a constant clamor that drowns out the truth: "car dans le silence on ne peut pas mentir" (Courtemanche 168). He even asserts that the continuous, empty noise reinforces the silence that ultimately allows for the killing. Despite his strong statement regarding the absence-presence of silence, Courtemanche does not present the Rwandais as outside of the problem, nor does he insinuate that they are ignorant to their own guilt. Émérita admits, "Ils sont sûrs de pouvoir nous exterminer. Notre silence et notre passivité leur donnent du courage et des forces" (Courtemanche 214). Here one can see Courtemanche's willingness to underscore the complexity of the situation and accuse everyone of his or her faults in the situation, even if it is difficult to accept that genocide victims may also be responsible for their lack of action.

Culpable lectors

Courtemanche implicates the characters of *Un dimanche* as participants in the injustice and genocide and as victims of the hatred, prejudice or indifference that allowed the genocide to occur. In this way they are seen in a fuller, more complex way that is closer to the reality of human existence. Additionally, he presents and participates in a larger debate about the lack of action by Western nations and the unethical representations of the genocide in the media. Both of these elements are significant in

distinguishing his text from others that exploit and further degrade the victims or that simplify the situation to make it seem like fictional horror. However, it is in Courtemanche's choice to implicate the reader in accusations against a world that failed in its response to the Rwandan genocide, and to include the reader among the violated victims, that truly makes his work stand apart. *Un dimanche à la piscine à Kigali* succeeds in representing the horrors committed at Kigali because he presents them as crimes both by and against humanity as a whole.

The reader participates in the novel as both a violator and victim of violation in the plot line of the text. The reader violates the characters because of the voyeurism in which he participates as he reads and reacts to the detailed descriptions of both sex and violence. For instance, in the scene where Méthode is living his last moments in the hotel room the reader intrudes on an intimate moment, not only sexually but also emotionally. We are the uninvited spectator who places judgment or perhaps feels uncomfortable or even aroused. There are almost two pages of a detailed description of the sexual acts Agathe performs with and for Méthode before he dies. "Je n'ai plus de sexe, je n'ai plus de sperme. Ta langue est comme un serpent qui m'ensorcelle, mais ma langue est encore vivante, laisse-moi te boire" (Courtemanche 78). These details are intimate and, in reading them, we invade the privacy of the characters and feel uncomfortable with knowing too much. This is especially true because Courtemanche indicated in his preface that the characters are based on real people. While the sexual pleasure given to Méthode was watched by the friends and family who "se regroupèrent religieusement autour du lit, retenant leur souffle et admirant" (Courtemanche 77), we are not friends or family who participate in the sacredness of the celebration. We are outsiders with a different set

of cultural norms. We are concerned that Agathe will contract AIDS. We are uncomfortable with the fact that Méthode's mother is present and even places her hand on Méthode's stomach so that Agathe could more easily engage in oral sex. It is also possible that as readers we bring our own beliefs about sexual intimacy to our reading of Courtemanche's novel, such as preferring monogamous, private sexual relations. As spectators we impose those beliefs on the scene, or at the very least we wrestle with them as we continue to "watch". One could argue that as we inflict our judgment upon the situation, we cheapen and degrade it, reducing the acts to prostitution-like.

The reader is again guilty of voyeurism in the rape of Cyprien's wife and death of both Cyprien and his wife. The reader has knowledge that Cyprien's wife was raped repeatedly by Hutu soldiers. However, Courtemanche pushes the boundaries of his text even further in that he gives the detailed account of the forced rape between Cyprien and his wife. "[S]a femme gisait, la jupe remontée sur son ventre. Elle gémissait. Deux jeunes miliciens complètement hilares tenaient ses jambes écartées et un troisième immobilisait sa tête. Un sein pendait en dehors de son tee-shirt déchiré et ensanglanté" (Courtemanche 128). So much detail is given that it actually reproduces the violent, obscene images associated with the event for the reader. With a gun to his head, Cyprien undresses his already violated, bloody wife. The narration continues with emphasis on the gentleness and delicateness with which he proceeds. He kisses the entirety of her body and the angry soldier attacks him with a machete. This does not stop him. He continues: "pour la première fois de sa vie, il enfouit sa tête entre les cuisses de sa femme et suçà, embrassa, mangea son sexe" (Courtemanche 130).

The reader is placed in the position of a voyeur like that of the soldiers, as spectators of what should be an incredibly intimate moment, but is not because it happens within the context of such violence. Not only has the violence of the war stolen their pleasure, but we have as well. Our presence adds to the shame and humiliation. The horror does not stop there however. Cyprien then penetrates his wife, and just before ejaculating, he is murdered. The reader is a passive witness: we have been witness to the whole event and did nothing. In the same way that Courtemanche accuses the foreign world of being witness without having acted, the reader is now implicated as a bystander, and not necessarily an innocent one at that. Watching Georgina experience the most horrible moments of her life would further humiliate her, which is why the soldiers did it. She was stripped of her identity of being a woman: rape was used as an instrument of degradation.

In Cecile Dauphin's compilation *De la violence et des femmes* many authors discuss the use of rape as a weapon of war and attest to its historical use as a proof of the inhumanity of the enemy. They demonstrate that the women victims of the rape are reduced to objects symbolizing the power and domination of men. Ripa and Grappe, respectively, discuss the systematic use of rape as a weapon of war in the Spanish Civil War and in former Yugoslavia. In the case of former Yugoslavia, rape was seen as a way to adulterate blood and as an ethnic cleansing⁶. In both situations rape was used to

⁶ In the compilation of texts on the topic of violence and women edited by Dauphin, Véronique Nahoum-Grappe discusses the use of rape in war in ex-Yugoslavia. During international tribunal following the genocide in 1996, rape was considered a crime against humanity for the first time in history. There is evidence of rape as a weapon of war in Croatia in 1991, but in the Bosnian war from 1992-1995 it becomes a systematic tool of domination and for ethnic purification because filiation was determined by paternal blood. Rape was considered not only a moral and physical aggression, but also the murder of the identity of the female victim. In the context of the Spanish civil war, Yannick Ripa explains that the insurgents utilized

humiliate and dishonor the victim, and to create a climate of terror. The shame associated with the rape play a significant role in the power of rape as a weapon in war. As spectators of the rapes that occur in *Un dimanche à la piscine*, we contribute to the degradation of the victims. Granted, this is a fictional event written in a novel. However, Courtemanche testifies to the veracity of his accounts that as a nation, we stood by and allowed it to occur. As reader, we must begin to examine our own responsibility to speak out and act against the violence that we now more completely understand.

However, as readers we are not only the aggressors who stand next to the soldiers and violate the victims; we are also victims to the violence of the text. We are forced to be among the murders who are watching. Over and over again the reader is exposed to the graphic details that paint obscene pictures. We see the blood and tears. We feel nauseated and lose our breath. The reader is physically affected by the violence described and by the violent nature of the language itself. The following citation, which describes the death seen by Valcourt on the street, demonstrates the violent nature of the language: “Les cadavres des hommes faisaient des taches noir et blanc, les seins dénudés, la culotte rose ou rouge encerclant les genoux. Valcourt les voyait trembler, les entendait râler et gémir” (Courtemanche 278). Courtemanche purposefully includes sound and color to increase the visual imagery such that multiple senses of the reader are attacked. In this part of the citation it is the rhythm of the language that is most striking:

On tuait les hommes, d’un coup de feu ou d’un coup de machette, savant et précis. Mais les femmes n’avaient pas droit à une mort claire et nette. On les mutilait, on les violait, mais on ne les achevait pas, comme on l’aurait fait avec des animaux blessés. On les laissait aller au bout de leur sang, sentir venir la mort râle par râle,

rape against the republican women in order to degrade them and prove the inhumanity of the republicans because of the impurity of their women.

crachat par crachat, pour les punir d'avoir mis au monde tant de Tutsis, mais aussi pour les punir de leur arrogance car, à tous ces jeunes qui tuaient, on avait raconté que la femme tutsie se croyait trop belle pour eux. (Courtemanche 278-79)

In this novel there are several long, never-ending sentences composed of shorter phrases. Such a structure echoes the way in which the women are killed. Blow by blow, one form of torture after another, the women slowly meet their death. As the quote states, not even hurt animals would be left to suffer that way. However, in the case of the Rwandan genocide the women were considered less valuable than animals, and were treated with less respect. The style of writing here matches the slow, painful process of the women losing their lives, and with each additional phrase, the reader loses a part of his or her soul.

On another level, Courtemanche implicates the reader by defining the problem of the Rwandan genocide in more universal terms to which everyone relates. He says that hate was the sickness that caused the slaughter to happen and that this root of genocide is something from which humanity in general suffers. For instance, we as readers participate in the hatred because of the way in which we respond to the media's portrayal of the genocide. We turn away from the gruesome pictures wondering when they will stop. In this way we are no different from Valcourt and Raphael who wished that Méthode was already dead. Furthermore, we believe and perpetuate the stereotypes of evil, backward Africans who kill each other. We allow ourselves to be manipulated by the information and pictures that we receive about the "other". This is fundamentally similar to the Hutu soldiers who killed their Tutsi neighbors and friends because they believed the propaganda that they were told on Rwandan radio: the root of all their problems was the Tutsis who were nothing more than cockroaches.

Moreover, Courtemanche identifies superiority as another root to genocide and demonstrates that no one is superior to this problem of superiority. He explains that the conflict between the Hutu and Tutsi had existed for centuries because of a longstanding battle in which both ethnic groups wanted to assert themselves as superior, thus insinuating that the Tutsi were actually no better than the Hutu. Courtemanche also bridges the gap between the Rwandans and the Whites who also see themselves as superior.

Célestin, a Hutu, avait rapidement compris que les Blancs se croyaient supérieurs. Cela ne le dérangeait pas. De tout temps, des individus, des clans, des tribus avaient promené leur supériorité proclamée sur les collines et dans les vallées. Certains usaient de la force, d'autres du commerce, pour s'affirmer, mais toujours, chacun à sa façon. (Courtemanche 36)

Once again, the similarities between people are emphasized: everyone sees him or herself as superior, and thus everyone is guilty of the same sin that has led to genocide. Contrary to the way in which the obscene media images make genocide seem like a horror film, and thus allows the viewer to distance him or herself from the reality, Courtemanche does not allow for this distancing. He forces the reader to examine the truth because he erases the distance between the readers and the people involved directly in the genocide-both the victims and aggressors of the rapes and murders. Courtemanche suggests that the reader is not all too different from the characters in the text or the actual people who lived the tragedy. The hope is that the reader then has to examine his or her own culpability.

Conclusion

Un dimanche à la piscine à Kigali is both successful and ethical in its representation of genocide. The hybrid nature of the text, which is at the same time novel,

report, and chronic, and includes references to the poems of Eluard, emphasizes the veracity of the events and suggests that the book be read as a testimony. As Courtemanche states in his preface, it gives victims a voice, but his text also gives victims and perpetrators a face that is not all together different from one another. Part of the ability to avoid responsibility in extreme situations such as genocide is due to the faceless nature of the enemy. However, rather than allowing the blurred boundaries in a complicated situation to efface responsibility, Courtemanche requires everyone to take responsibility. As Toonder states, Courtemanche “achieves this by looking for the borderline, by writing from the limits from which he can do justice to reality” (Milne 106). He crosses the boundaries of what is comfortable and easy to accept. He also defies the limits of a typical fictional text. He benefits from the fact that fiction can provide a more nuanced and sensitive perspective but also uses the aspects of *chronique* and *reportage* to highlight and participate in a larger discourse on moral responsibility in cases of genocide, for victims, perpetrators, and bystanders alike. What is more, Courtemanche systematically includes his characters, the international public, and the reader himself in each of those categorizations. In doing so, he denies the stereotypes and prejudices and forces the reader to reflect upon his own ethical obligations to humankind. Thus, Courtemanche returns some of the humanity that was lost in the degrading violence of genocide.

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